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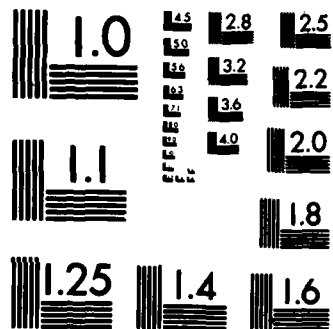
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HIGH EFFICIENCY PICOSECOND PULSE GENERATION
IN THE 675 - 930 NM REGION FROM A DYE LASER
SYNCHRONOUSLY PUMPED BY AN ARGON-ION LASER

BY

Philippe Bado, Charles Dupuy and Kent R. Wilson
Department of Chemistry
University of California San Diego
La Jolla, CA 92093

AND

Richard Boggy, John Bowen and Sicco Westra
Spectra-Physics, Inc.
Mountain View, CA 94042

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Philippe Bado, Charles Dupuy and Kent R. Wilson

Département of Chemistry, University of California San Diego,
La Jolla, California 92093.

Richard Boggy, John Bowen and Sicco Westra

Spectra-Physics, Inc., Mountain View, California 94042

ABSTRACT

Picosecond pulses tunable from 675 to 930 nm have been obtained from a dye-laser synchronously pumped at 514.5 nm by a mode-locked Argon-ion laser. Peak energy conversion efficiencies between 10% and 29% are observed with pulse durations between 1.7 ps and 16 ps as measured by autocorrelation.

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Philippe Bado, Charles Dupuy and Kent R. Wilson

Department of Chemistry, University of California San Diego,
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Richard Boggy, John Bowen and Sicco Westra

Spectra-Physics, Inc., Mountain View, California 94042

INTRODUCTION

In this letter we describe the generation of wavelength-tunable picosecond pulses in the far-red to near-infrared by synchronously pumping a dye laser with the 514.5 nm line of a mode-locked Argon-ion laser. Near IR picosecond pulse generation by synch-pumping has been reported earlier,¹ using the less intense 647.1 nm line of a Krypton laser. An alternative technique for obtaining infrared laser emission with an Argon-ion laser is to cascade two dye-lasers, so that the output of the first dye laser (typically in the orange-red) is used to pump the second dye-laser.^{2,3} This technique however suffers from low overall efficiency and stability. Generation of picosecond pulses at even longer wavelengths is possible by pumping at 1.06 μm with the fundamental of a Nd laser, as shown recently by Seilmeier et al.⁴

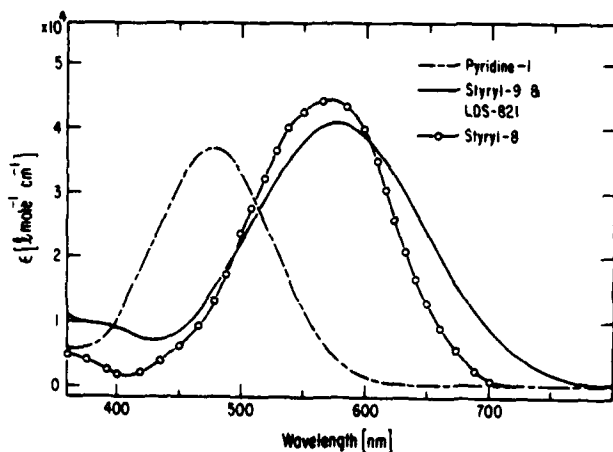


Fig. 1. Decadic molar extinction coefficient for the four dyes listed in Table 1.

Several new commercially available dyes⁵ can now provide deep red to near-infrared dye laser operation with green pump light. Figure 1 shows the absorption spectrum, measured with a Hewlett Packard model 8450 parallel-detector spectrometer, of four such dyes: Pyridine-1 (also designated LDS-698), Styryl-8 (LDS-751), Styryl-9 (LDS-820) and LDS-821 (a dye very similar to Styryl-9 but with a longer lifetime under photochemical excitation). Earlier reports^{6,7} indicate that these new compounds lase extremely efficiently in the deep red to the near-

infrared when continuously pumped in the green, with efficiency as high as 25% reported⁶ for Pyridine-1.

We report here the characterization of the efficient synch-pumped operation of these dyes using standard commercial equipment.

EXPERIMENT AND RESULTS

The pump laser in this experiment is an Argon-ion laser, Spectra-Physics (SP) model 171, mode-locked at 514.5 nm to produce 150 ps (FWHM) pulses at ~80 MHz (output power 0.8 watt) or ~240 MHz (output power 1.8 watts). The dye laser (SP model 375) uses a tuning wedge or a one (or two)-plate birefringent filter. Internal reflectors and output coupler mirrors are matched to the spectral band of interest for maximum power or shortest pulse as shown in Table 1.

Alignment of the dye-laser does not present any major problems. Dye fluorescence up to 850 nm can still be seen with the naked eye in a dark room. Above 850 nm alignment of the cavity requires the use of an IR phosphor coated card.⁸

Table 1. *Dye-laser operating parameters.*

Dye Concentration (mmole/liter)	Optics		Range (nm)	Output	
	Folding mirrors (SP model #)	Output mirror (SP model #)		Power (mW)	Pulse Width (ps)
Pyridine-1 (LDS-698) 1.8	G3845-008	G0058-006	694-773	145**	10.5
	G3845-008	G0058-006	673-773	343	8.0
	G3845-008	G0058-006	***	125**	1.7
Styryl-8 (LDS-751) 2.0	G3845-008	G0058-905	700-812	190	12.0
Styryl-9 (LDS-820) 1.85	G3845-011	G0058-S9-B	775-840	180*	10.5
	G3845-010	G0058-S9-B	790-913	180*	10.5
	G3845-011	G0058-905	781-840	740	16.0
	G3845-010	G0058-905	792-880	740	16.0
LDS-821 1.85	G3845-011	G0058-905	785-840	630	16.0
	G3845-010	G0058-905	790-931	630	16.0

* Operation at 80 MHz with a one-plate birefringent filter.

** Operation at 80 MHz with a two-plate birefringent filter.

***Recorded at peak power.

All others at 240 MHz with a tuning wedge.

The pulse widths are measured with an autocorrelator (SP model 409) with angle phase-matched KDP. They are always shorter when operating at 80 MHz. The wavelengths are measured using a calibrated 1/4 m grating spectrometer with 0.5 nm resolution, the power is recorded with a Scientech model 36-0001 laser power meter.

The dyes dissolve easily in dimethyl sulfoxide (DMSO) and propylene carbonate (PC), but have a limited solubility in ethylene glycol (EG), the standard solvent for jet-stream dye laser operation. Due to health hazards⁹ associated with DMSO/dye solutions, we avoided their use. A mixture of 15% PC (Aldrich, 99%) and 85% EG (Mallinckrodt, analytical reagent) was found to support the requisite concentration of dye without precipitation. This solvent mixture,

when maintained at room temperature, possesses sufficient viscosity for a stable jet stream.¹⁰

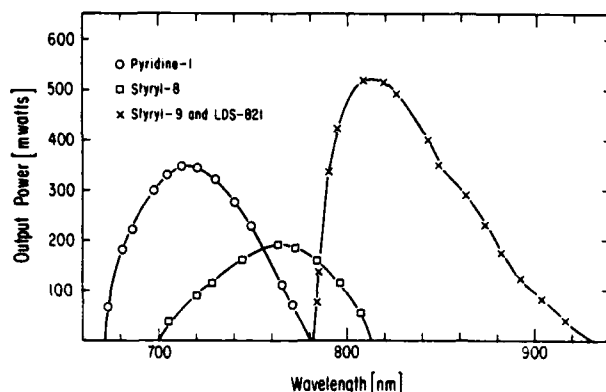


Fig. 2. Output power versus wavelength for mode-locked operation (240 MHz) with 1.8 W pump power and wedge tuning.

In Fig. 2 the average mode-locked output power is plotted as a function of the lasing wavelength. For 1.8 W of pump power at 240 MHz we observe an average output power peaking at 520 mW for both Styryl-9 and LDS-821. The maximum efficiency for Pyridine-1 is only 19% when sync-pumped, which is less than the 25% reported⁶ when pumped CW all-lines. This is probably due to the fact that Pyridine-1 absorbs more in the blue than in the green, as shown in Fig. 1.

Typically, the average power decreases by a factor of 2.5 when operating at 80 MHz with 0.8 W pump power instead of at 240 MHz and 1.8 W. In general, power goes up by ~20% and temporal pulse width increases when using the birefringent filter (one or two plates) instead of the tuning wedge. The concentration has been optimized for maximum output power, but concentration changes of $\pm 10\%$ do not materially affect the efficiency.

Pyridine-1 and LDS-821 show no noticeable photochemical degradation after 550 watts-hours. The Styryl-9 power output dropped by ~15% after 100 watts-hours. Degradation measurements were not made for Styryl-8.

CONCLUSION

In summary, we have demonstrated the generation of picosecond pulses in the 675-930 nm spectral range, using an Argon-ion laser as a pump. This range has been previously accessible only to the less intense Krypton-ion laser. Peak efficiency as high as 29% is measured for both Styryl-9 and LDS-821 at 809 nm, making them some of the most efficient argon-ion pumped laser dyes.

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